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SUBJECT: (SBU) TFGG01: Russian media continues to push anti-U.S.,
anti-Georgian message

¶1. (SBU) Summary: In a tone reminiscent of the early 20th century
"yellow press", Russian media continues its nonstop coverage of the
South Ossetian-Georgian conflict, through the prism of Georgian
violence against South Ossetians. The major themes focus on
foreign, particularly U.S., involvement and the anti-Russia bias in
the Western media. The ad hominem attacks on Georgian President
Mikhail Saakashvili and his government continue unabated (reftel).

Washington is (still) aiding Georgia

¶2. (SBU) Russian television news coverage continues to emphasize
foreign, particularly U.S., involvement in the Georgian conflict.
Rossiya, a state television channel, on its August 11 evening news
program highlighted an article from the Israeli tabloid "Ma'ariv"
alleging that the U.S. was sending munitions intended for U.S.
troops in Iraq to Georgia through Jordan. The broadcast included
the editorial comment that "... although the White House said it was
not going to provide military aid, Georgia is being heavily armed."
Russian Deputy Chief of the General Staff Anatoly Nogovitsyn was
quoted by various Russian TV stations as calling the return of
Georgian troops from Iraq to Georgia on U.S. military planes as a
form of military assistance to Tbilisi. Prime Minister Putin
insinuated the same in comments picked up in the broadcast and print
press: "It's too bad that several of our partners are not helping
us, but are attempting to interfere. I have in mind the U.S. using
its military transportation to redeploy Georgian troops from Iraq."

¶3. (SBU) Komsomolskaya Pravda, a pro-Kremlin tabloid, had a picture
of Saakashvili handing out assault rifles to Georgian troops on its
August 12 front page with the headline reading "Who prepared Georgia
for war? And how?" The accompanying article detailed military aid
given to Georgia by various NATO and "unfriendly" (ex. Ukraine)
states. The U.S. headed the list, even though other nations were
listed as having given more to Tbilisi.

¶4. (U) Several outlets have published criticisms from a retired
American visiting his wife's relatives in Ossetia to support the
idea that the U.S. is directly involved in the conflict. Newspaper
Izvestia quoted Florida resident Joseph Mestas as saying that the
situation in South Ossetia was worse than what Western media has
portrayed and that said that Saakashvili and POTUS would have to
answer for this. State-owned English language television network
Russia Today interviewed Mestas while running the caption headline,
"City Turns into a Human Hell." The Russia Today correspondent
noted that "Some Russian officials claim that Washington carries
part of the blame by providing Tbilisi with military assistance."

(SBU) Western media = Unfair

15. (SBU) Complaints about Western media coverage of the conflict continued unabated. On August 11, Russian television aired CNN footage of Saakashvili running for shelter while walking around Gori with French Foreign Minister Kushner. Rossiya labeled the footage an example of "American TV's warfare" against Russia, explaining that "Saakashvili was shown coming under Russian fire, but no sound could be heard except voices of his bodyguards." Russian news website lenta.ru continued in the same vein, stating that "The West is trying to scold Russia, but lacks credibility, since the information used [by the West] is too biased."

16. (SBU) Yet despite cries of pro-Georgian coverage, we have noticed that the Russian wire service Interfax has become a primary source for information from the region in Western media. Possible reasons for Interfax's popularity include its offering of news items in English and its official independence from the state, unlike its competitors Ria-Novosti and ITAR-TASS.

(SBU) Saakashvili = Hitler; Georgians = Nazis

17. (SBU) Drawing upon the Soviet Union's veneration of the Second World War, Russian media has been quick to compare Saakashvili to the German dictator and the Georgian army to fascist brownshirts. Kommersant, a business-oriented daily, quoted Speaker of the Russian Duma Boris Gryzlov as comparing Georgian actions in South Ossetia to Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union. Speaker of the Federation Council (Russia's upper house of parliament) Sergei Mironov chimed in by comparing the Georgian government to Nazis. Putin compared Saakashvili to Saddam Hussein.

18. (U) Many broadcast news programs and newspapers - including Izvestiya, Kommersant, Vedemosti, Nezavisimaya Gazeta -- carried

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pictures of the Gori incident, showing a sweaty Saakashvili crouched between body guards with a visible look of panic on his face. Rossiya added further spin to the footage with the voice over: "Watch the hot-tempered Georgian President scared by the sound of distant gunfire." TV Center commented: "No aircraft appeared in the sky, but the staged footage came out well." Finally, First Channel's nighttime news described Saakashvili's "surprisingly inadequate behavior." The offscreen comment said: "The President was scared by the sound of his own artillery that resumed shelling South Ossetia ... Unlike Saakashvili, the cameraman who filmed the footage remained calm, his camera did not shake."

19. (SBU) Comment: With the exception of some individual voices, mainstream Russian media seems united in its support for Russian actions in the Caucasus, its condemnation of Georgia and Saakashvili, and accusations of Western support for Georgia against Russia. The jingoistic coverage has caught the public's attention - according to a poll done by TNS Gallup Media, viewership for news programs has grown 2-3 times while interest in films and the Olympic Games has dropped to second and third place.

110. (SBU) Comment continued: As to reftel's hypothesis of Russia laying the groundwork for possible Kosovo-South Ossetia/Abkhazia comparison, the media coverage continues to support such a move. Centrist Kremlin-affiliated daily Vremya Novostey noted on August 12 that "Moscow has already made it understood that its recognition of South Ossetia's and Abkhazia's independence is a matter of time." End comment.